

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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RADIO ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT  
TO THE NATION

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. Today I want to talk to you about one of the most important steps we can take to clean the air we breathe, and protect the health of all Americans.

Over the past generation, our nation has made enormous progress in improving the quality of our air. In the late 1960s, carbon monoxide, lead, and smog levels were so high in several major cities that walking to school in the morning could be almost as harmful for young children as smoking cigarettes.

Today, people are breathing easier all across our country. Thanks to engineering breakthroughs and bipartisan environmental stewardship over the past three decades, we have reduced the annual emissions of harmful pollutants by a remarkable 70 million tons.

Over the past six years alone, even as our nation has produced the most dynamic economy in a generation, we have improved air quality in every single state. We've reduced toxic air pollution from chemical plants by 90 percent. We've set the toughest standards in decades for smog and soot, which will prevent millions of cases of childhood asthma. Just last week, the Vice President announced a new effort to clear the haze, and restore pristine skies to our national parks. But we must do more.

Americans love to drive, and we're driving more than ever. But the emissions from our cars, particularly from the larger, less efficient vehicles, threaten to erode many of the air quality gains America has achieved. As a result, many of our states and cities are no longer on course to meet our vital air quality goals.

So last year, EPA Administrator Carol Browner sat down with members of the oil and auto industries, environmental and public health groups and state and local governments, to study how we can stay on track. The level of cooperation was unprecedented, and so was the result.

Today, I am proud to announce the details of this EPA proposal. The proposal would achieve a dramatic reduction in air pollution for the 21st century, and it would do so in the most cost effective and flexible ways. For the first time, we would require all passenger vehicles, including the popular sport utility vehicles, to meet the same tough pollution standards. And for the first time our plan addresses not only the cars we drive, but also the fuel they use. Because sulfur clogs and impairs anti-pollution devices, we're proposing to cut the sulfur content of gasoline by about 90 percent over the next five years.

Beginning in the year 2004, manufacturers would start producing vehicles that are 75 to 95 percent cleaner than those rolling off the assembly lines today. And the health benefits would be enormous. Every year we can prevent thousands of premature deaths, tens of thousands of cases of respiratory illness and hundreds of thousands of lost work days.

According to some estimates, the benefits of the proposal may outweigh the costs by as much as four to one. In designing this proposal we've taken great pains to make sure these new standards will not cause hardship for industry or reduce consumer choice.

In many cases, existing technology will allow manufacturers to meet the new standards and still offer the same models popular with consumers today. To accommodate manufacturers and sport utility vehicles, and others who face special challenges, our proposal provides extra time to meet the new standards. We will spend the next several months getting comments and suggestions on the plan. Now that the EPA has published its proposal, a 60-day period of public comment and public hearings will begin. With the help of interested citizens, industry and public health and other groups, we believe we can finalize this proposal by the end of the year.

Ever since the days when thick smog was choking our major cities, pessimists have claimed that protecting the environment and strengthening the economy were incompatible goals. But, today, our economy is the strongest in a generation and our environment is the cleanest in a generation. Whether the issue was deadly pesticides, fouled rivers or polluted air, the American people have always proved the pessimists wrong.

With the EPA's new clean air proposal, we will prove them

wrong once again. Not only will we enhance our long-term prosperity, we will ensure that our children inherit a living, breathing Earth, our most important obligation of all.

Thanks for listening.

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